

THE LOWER PUTAH CREEK WATERSHED STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Submitted by:

Solano County Department of Environmental Management, Planning Division
Jones & Stokes Associates

II. Executive Summary

b. Project Description and Biological/Ecological Objectives: Solano County and cooperating stakeholders propose to develop a community-based watershed stewardship program for lower Putah Creek. The watershed program will develop and implement a watershed strategy that will restore ecosystem processes, reduce environmental stressors, and integrate aquatic and riparian habitat enhancement, vegetation management, water quality protection and improvement, agricultural economic viability and water use, and public education. The program will build on previous public involvement and stakeholder outreach programs to identify and prioritize the major resource issues and planning objectives, build consensus among the interested parties, and ensure that the watershed strategy addresses the needs and concerns of the stakeholders while respecting the rights of private landowners.

The watershed of lower Putah Creek has played a prominent role in the development and growth of the Yolo and Solano County region. Urban and agricultural development within the region have resulted in numerous permanent alterations along the creek, including construction of the Monticello and Solano Diversion Dams, gravel mining, construction of flood control levees, and implementation of other flood control measures, such as channel excavation and vegetation clearing. These alterations resulted in the loss of more than 90% of the creek's historical riparian corridor and more than 80% of shaded riverine aquatic (SRA) habitat. Despite these changes, the lower Putah Creek corridor represents one of the most extensive tracts of "natural" habitat in northern Solano and southern Yolo Counties, and because of its connection to the Yolo Basin and the Sacramento River, the creek plays an important role in the movement and dispersal of wildlife and fish, including a unique assemblage of fish native to the Central Valley.

Project objectives of the proposed watershed program will include development of a diverse, community-based watershed stewardship group comprised of landowners; water users; local conservancy groups; and state, and federal resources agencies; and local government representatives. This group will work to identify the problems and issues faced by those who use the watershed and develop a mutually beneficial strategy for the balanced implementation of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program (CALFED) objectives for habitat restoration, agricultural enterprise, vegetation management, and water quality protection and improvement.

c. Approach/Tasks/Schedule: Solano County, with technical and facilitation services by Jones & Stokes Associates (JSA), proposes to develop the watershed stewardship program with the support of a diverse group of community-based stakeholders. The tasks included in Phase I will be: (1) organize the stewardship group; (2) collect, analyze, and present resource information needed to develop the watershed strategy; (3) conduct meetings and workshops; (5) solicit input from resource agencies; and (6) prepare the watershed strategy. This initial phase is anticipated to take 18 months to complete.

d. Justification for Project and Funding by CALFED: Restoration of aquatic and riparian habitats in lower Putah Creek is consistent with CALFED's Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan (ERPP). Stakeholders in the Putah Creek watershed below Monticello Dam have repeatedly expressed a willingness to work cooperatively to restore the creek's riparian and instream habitats. Over the past decade a number of forums have been established to find consensus on important creek issues. These efforts have established important relationships among the stakeholders and set the groundwork for a variety of issues on which the majority of stakeholders still agree. With respect to the quantity of water needed for some creek resources, stakeholders have not yet reached agreement. They do agree, however, that a community-driven process based on CALFED objectives provides the best opportunity to achieve long-lasting ecosystem solutions for lower Putah Creek.

e. Budget Costs and Third-Party Impacts: The estimated cost of Phase 1 of the watershed stewardship program is \$105,424.67. Implementation of the pilot projects identified in Phase 2 is estimated to cost \$194,450.00. Total estimated cost is \$299,874.67. Cost estimates for future site-specific phases of the project will be developed as part of the watershed stewardship program and implemented by local stakeholder groups as funding opportunities arise. Long-term restoration activities are expected to be compatible with flood control system integrity, water supply needs, water quality objectives, and the protection of special-status wildlife species.

f. Applicant Qualifications: Solano County is committed to the long-term restoration of fish and wildlife habitats in the lower Putah Creek watershed. JSA has highly qualified technical and public involvement staff and is presently the project manager and developer of the methods for the Lower Butte Creek Project, a similar and highly successful stakeholder-driven process that is developing fish passage alternatives balanced with maintenance of agricultural viability and a managed waterfowl habitats program.

g. Monitoring and Data Evaluation: Information gathered during the data collection and analysis process will be used to identify baseline conditions for future planning and benefit evaluations, and for implementation of adaptive management programs.

h. Local Support/Coordination with Other Programs/Compatibility with CALFED

Objectives: The Lower Putah Creek Watershed Stewardship Program is supported by a diverse mix of federal, state, and local government, private, and nonprofit organizations including: Solano County Board of Supervisors; Solano County Regional Parks; Yolo County Board of Supervisors; City of Davis; City of Winters; Putah Creek Council; Winters Putah Creek Committee; Dry Creek Citizens Group; Yolo Land Trust; County Farmlands and Open Space Foundation; University of California Davis, Putah Cache Bioregion Project; and several private creekside landowners. Other interested stakeholders who have expressed interest in participating in this project include: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), California Department of Fish and Game (DFG), Department of Water Resources (DWR), Yolo Basin Foundation, Ulati Resource Conservation District, Dixon Resource Conservation District, and Solano County Water Agency. Together, these stakeholders will take a strong interest in the ecological and nonecological objectives of CALFED.